

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh – Leith Walk Garden Named Gardeners

A list of 162 named gardeners recorded in the garden accounts as working at Leith Walk Garden between 1763 and 1810

Regius Keepers:

John Hope	born 1725	Regius Keeper 1761	died 1786
Daniel Rutherford	born 1749	Regius Keeper 1786	died 1819
Robert Graham	born 1786	Regius Keeper 1820	died 1845

(the Botanic Garden moved to its current site in Inverleith between 1821 and 1823)

Head Gardeners/Principal Gardeners:

As named in *Notes of the Royal Botanic Garden* vol.iii no.xii, 1904

John Williamson	died as PG 1780 (he was already Principal Gardener by the time the Leith Walk Garden was established)
Malcolm McCoig	PG ?1782 – 1789 (died)
Robert Menzies	PG 1789 – 1799 (died)
John McKay b.1772	PG 1800– 1802 (died)
George Don b.?1764	PG 1802 – 1806? (resigned) died 1814
Thomas Somerville b.c1783	PG 1806 – 1810 (died)
William McNab b.1780	PG 1810 – 1848 (died)

Gardeners were named on the list of disbursements (or small garden related payments) kept by the head gardener and they were usually required to sign a receipt of payment. Disbursement lists, receipts and bills have been located for the period 1763-1810. There is also an account book kept by William McNab (filed in the William McNab boxes in the RBGE Archive) detailing the names of individuals working in the 'new' (Inverleith) garden 1821-23. Gardening staff are (mostly) not specifically identified. The book is also difficult to read and awaits full transcription.

Gardeners other than Head Gardeners and the years their names appear in accounts

Information is from the duplicate documents at RBGE obtained from originals held at the NRS and also from the transcribed accounts made by Isaac Bayley Balfour (R.K.), held at RBGE. The transcribed accounts cover the years 1764-1769 and 1787-1793 (filed in Archive Room under 'RBGE') and 1801-1808 (filed in the William McNab boxes)

No specific and consistent term such as 'foreman' can be found in the accounts viewed (though 'under-gardener' is occasionally found). In the accounts all the gardening staff other than the Head Gardener were termed 'men' – and they received wages for 'work in the garden'. Where names recur and are not associated with bills for specific trades, a gardening function has been assumed. Wages vary, for individuals as well as between individuals. Deducing a precise hierarchy of gardening staff from accounting records is difficult. Also it is difficult to draw a line between menial gardening work and labouring, particularly as gardeners were sometimes paid for specified large digging tasks etc. As a rough rule, for compiling this list, individuals are included if they were paid more than 1/- per day.

Judging by the dates, the same surname probably indicates a familial relationship – with the gardeners listed or with the Head Gardener. Where there is a lengthy gap in service (as for George Anderson see below) two related individuals may have shared the same name.

The writing is not absolutely clear, but 'Jean Cuthberston/Culbertson' could be an early record of a named female gardener.

Gardeners visiting from other estates/gardens etc are included at the end of the alphabetical list

Variations in spelling have been recorded, '?' = difficult to decipher script

149 names are recorded below - and the years in which they worked:

Allardice, James	1802
Anderson, George	1769, 1770, 1782
Angus, Robert	1776
Baillie, George	1780
Barnet, Andrew	1765
Barnet/Barnard, Peter	1806 Barnet 1807
Bean, John	1767, 1769
Beattie, William	1799

Bell, John	1779
Bette (?sp), William	1768
Blair, Thomas	1803
?Brown, Thomas	1805
Bruce, John	1803
?Bush, ?Bass, Thomas	1804
Campbell, Alexander	1797
Campbell, Robert	1787, 1788, 1789
Colder, Donald	1803
Cook, John	1784
Cooper, James	1766, 1767
Cupper, Thomas	1787, later Thomas Couper 1787 prob same man
Cowden, Pat (poss same as below),	1789, 1790
Cowden, Peter	1765, 1766, 1767, (Coudon) 1769 (Cowden) 1770, 1772 (Coudon) 1773 (Cowden thereafter) 1774, 1775, 1776, 1777, 1779, 1780, 1782 (also for 'making pins') 1783, 1784, 1787, 1788, 1789
Crawford, John	1806
Cuthbertson (or Culbertson), Jean	1802 (1 st name on receipt could be Ian or Jaen), clearly Jean Culbertson 1803
Cuthell, John	1765
Dickson, James	1805 (=name of nearby nursery) 1806
Don, Donald	1803
Donaldson, Robert	1803
Drummond, John	1770
Farchar, William	1794
Fenwick, David	1804
Finlayson, Alexander	1806
Fleming, Peter	1797, 1798
Forbes, Henry	1803
Forrest, Andrew	1765
Forest, William	1787 (also Forrest)

Fraser, James	1787, 1788
Frazer, Roderick	1788
French – see Tench	
Fyfe, Andrew (Fife 1772 only)	1773, 1774, 1775
Galloway, David	1799
Goodale, Peter	1806, 1807
Gordon, Alexander	1808
Gordon, Andrew	1769, 1770
Haig, Thomas	1800, 1801
Hardy, Andrew	1794
(?)Hemp, Henry	1801, 1802 (see Kemp below)
Henderson, George	1788
Henderson, John	1787
Henderson, Thomas	1794, 1795
Howatson, Alexander	1783
Hume, William (also for 'pins in oyle colour')	1783, 1784
Jackson, Alexander	1804
Jackson, George	1800, 1801, 1802
Jamieson, John	1808
Johnston, James	1766, 1767
Johnston, Joseph	1794
Junior, Thomas	1803
Kay, William	1796
Kemp, Henry	1803 poss same person as ?Hemp above 1804
?Keir, Collin	1808
Laird, James	1796
Laird, Thomas	1796
Lawrence, Alexander	1803
Lindsay, James	1807

Lindsay, John	1770, 1773, 1774 (Linsy) 1775, 1777 (Lindsy) 1779
Livingston, John	1807, 1808
Mackay (poss Murry), Alexander	1806
MacKay, George	1800, 1801, 1802
MacKay, Hugh	1770
MacKay, James	1796, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1801
MacKay, George	1800, 1801
MacKie, George	1769, 1770
MacKie, James	1769
MacLean, Simon	1802
MacLeish, Alexander	1804, MacLish 1805 MacLeish 1806
MacNab, Daniel	
Marchel, Charles	1769
Marten, David	1803, 1804
Maule, Pringle	1800
McCoig, Malcolm	1770, 1779, 1780
McGeachy, Alexander	1787, 1788
McHardy, John	1776
McKenzie, John	1803
McMachlan, William	1808
McNeil, James	
Melrose, William	1800 (spelled it himself 'Milross')
Menzies, Archibald	1770, 1775, 1776
Menzies, Robert	1781, 1782, 1783
Mill, John	1765
Miller (Millen?), (poss variation of Miln see below) James	1775
Miller, Robert	1807
Miln, James	1772, 1773, 1774, 1776
Milne, Peter	1772 (Milln) 1770
Moffat, William	1780, 1805 (poss father and son?)
Morison, David	1800
?Murry, Alexander	1806 (poss Mackay see above)

Nicol, George	1783, 1784
Niven, James	1795, 1796
Oldman, John	1803, 1804
Patton, William	1804
Porteous, Henry	1770, 1779, 1781, 1782, 1783 note in 1782 disbursements that had 'served the garden for 6 years' – maybe the 1770 record was another Henry Porteous? – where are records for 1776, 1777? Maybe he was a trader before he was a gardener. He comes back 1783/1784 for Dec/Jan only, bringing a new furnace/grate
Porteous, John	1796, 1797
Rattray, James	1803, 1804, 1805, 1806
Ray, William	1795
Reoch, George	1799
Rheuch, Alexander	1776
Richardson, George	1802, 1803
Richardson, Jas	1774
Richardson, John (same as above?)	1773
Richardson, William	1765
Richmond	1795
Ridley, Hugh	1766, 1767, 1768 (extra for working on 'importation scheme') 1769
Robertson, George	1803
Robertson, James	1765, 1766
Rodger, John	1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803, 1804
Roy, James	1806
Scott, Alexander	1805
Scougal, James	1770, 1776 (Schougal) 1775 (Schougal) 1777 (Scougal) 1779
Scoular, J	1783
Scrimgeour, James	1806

Seton, Alexander paid in	1781 for 'making plans', in 1780 for 'work'
Spiers, William	1802
Stephen, Magnus	1803
Stile, Alexander	1765, 1766
Sutherland, George	1800
Swinton, Melville	1796, 1797, 1798, 1799
Taylor, Thomas	1806
Tench (?French), Thomas	1806 Trench 1807
Tron, William	1804, 1805
Tully, Thomas	1797, 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802 signed for by Bro' John in 1803
Wabster, George	1767, 1768, 1769, 1770
Walker, Jas.	1797, 1798, 1799, 1800
Watson (?sp), Alexander	1787
Watson, John	1800
Watson, William	1804
Watt, John	1784, 1787
Whitehead, James	1787
Williamson, James	1766
Williamson, Robert	1803
Williamson, Samuel	1780 also signed off the disbursements for this year on behalf of his ?brother/?father John Williamson Head Gardener (disbursements listed in 1781 - but dealing with 1780) 1782, 1783
Wilson, William	1800
Wood, Alexander	1776
Wright, William	1766
Wright (no 1 st name)	1788
Young, James	1795

**Specified visiting gardeners employed elsewhere
(usually delivering plants)**

King of France's gardener	1782
Bruce Mr (gardener to the Duke of Atholl) Prob	1766 date not noted
Collie Mr	1766 (one off visit)
Gray – gardener paid with ale	c1766
'Mr Hamilton's gardener'	?1787
'Sir Tho Hope's gardener'	?c1766 no date noted.

These notes were compiled by Jane Corrie, Research Associate attached to the RBGE Library in 2009, who would appreciate any further information about these previous gardeners at RBGE.

©RBGE